IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims of the above-identified application as follows so as to place the same into condition for allowance, or at least better form for Appeal, pursuant to 37 CFR 1.116:

1. Canceled, without prejudice

2. Canceled, without prejudice

3. Canceled, without prejudice

4. Canceled, without prejudice

5. Canceled, without prejudice

6. (Currently Amended) An image processing apparatus including a ~~storing~~ storage unit ~~for storing~~ which stores image data and ~~performing~~ an image forming unit which performs an output process based on the image data stored in the ~~storing~~ storage unit, comprising a ~~controller including~~ controlling unit which performs:
>> ~~means for~~ designating image data stored in the ~~storing~~ storage
>>> unit, and accepting an instruction for concealment of the
>>> designated image data~~,~~;
>> ~~means for~~ detecting whether or not a processing unit
>>> which can be mounted to process the image data as
>>> an optional unit is provided and an operation state thereof~~,~~;

means for deciding either that the instruction for concealment

includes only associating the image data with authentication

information in the case when it is detected that the processing

unit is provided and active, or that the image data is encrypted

and associated with authentication information in the case

when it is detected that the processing unit is not provided

or is not active,

means for concealing the designated image data by the decided

concealing method based on the accepted instruction, and

means for nullifying image data which is not designated by repeatedly

overwriting the data which is not designated with meaningless

data whereby the undesignated image data is prevented from

recurring in said storing unit in reproducible form.

7. Canceled, without prejudice

8. Canceled, without prejudice

9.(Currently Amended) The image processing apparatus according to claim 6, wherein

the controller includes controlling unit performs:

means for decoding encrypted image data in the case of performing an output operation

based on the image data.

10. (Currently Amended) The image processing apparatus according to claim 6, wherein

the ~~controller~~ controlling unit further ~~comprises~~ performs:

~~means for~~ accepting authentication information;

~~means for~~ verifying the authentication information set to the image data with the accepted authentication information; and

~~means for~~ permitting the output process of the image data in the case when the authentication information set to the image data matches the accepted authentication information.

11. (Currently Amended) The image processing apparatus according to claim 9, wherein

the ~~controller~~ controlling unit further ~~comprises~~ performs:

~~means for~~ accepting authentication information;

~~means for~~ verifying the authentication information set to the image data with the accepted authentication information; and

~~means for~~ permitting the output process of the image data in the case when the authentication information set to the image data matches the accepted authentication information.

12. Canceled, without prejudice

13. Canceled, without prejudice

14. Canceled, without prejudice

15. Canceled, without prejudice

16. Canceled, without prejudice

17. Canceled, without prejudice

18. Canceled, without prejudice.

19. Canceled, without prejudice.

20. Canceled, without prejudice.

21. Canceled, without prejudice.